



Vacaville's season comes to an end with 54-13 loss to Del Oro

They say all great things must come to an end.

For Vacaville High School's football team, the final game of what has been a great season came Friday night in Loomis.

Del Oro quarterback Stone Smartt threw for 207 yards and two touchdowns, running back Dalton Gee scurried for 103 yards and two scores and wideout Mason Hurst hauled in seven grabs for 134 yards and two touchdowns as the Golden Eagles ended the Bulldogs' season with a 54-13 win in the second round of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II playoffs.

"Hats off to those guys (Del Oro)," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos. "They have a great football team over there. I'm proud of the effort our kids gave. I thought our defense played well in the first half. We played tough all the way to the end, but we just didn't get it done tonight."

It was an offensive explosion for a Del Oro team that has averaged 40 points a contest this year, but the Golden Eagles played just as well on defense. Vacaville's efficient running game was held in check as Del Oro loaded the box and held the Bulldogs to just three yards per carry on the night.

What made the lopsided final score all the more surprising was the fact that the Bulldogs marched right down the field on the first possession of the game and scored a touchdown. Vacaville was impressive out of the gate, going 81 yards in two minutes to steal an early 7-0 lead on the road as senior quarterback Troy Claunch scored on a sneak play on the 1-yard line. A deep 59 yard pass play to Jon Donaldson highlighted the scoring drive.

But that would be just about it for the Bulldog offense. Vacaville punted on each of its next three possessions in the first half.

Del Oro, the reigning Division II State Champion, answered like one would expect a title-winning team to respond. The Golden Eagles weren't flustered by the early deficit. They immediately drove down the field and scored on a 25 yard touchdown run from Gee. A successful two point conversion made it 8-7 Del Oro.

The Golden Eagles tacked on a field goal early in the second quarter before finishing the half with a four play, 59 yard touchdown drive. A 31 yard screen pass to Gee ultimately set up a Josh Gazzaniga 12 yard touchdown run. That touchdown happened with just under a minute left in the half and made the score 18-7.

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The Bulldogs held Hurst to just one catch for 15 yards in the first half as the defense was able to keep the game within reach going into the halftime break.

Unfortunately for Vacaville, Hurst and the Del Oro offense came alive in the second half.

The Golden Eagles had the ball five times in the second half and scored touchdowns on all five possessions. Del Oro received out of the break and ate up nearly half of the third quarter on a long 10 play drive that ended with Smartt finding Justin Pagluica in the end zone from 5 yards out.

After Vacaville turned it over on downs deep inside Del Oro territory, Smartt hit Hurst over the top of the defense for a 71 yard touchdown strike on the first play of the drive to make the score 33-7.

Vacaville tried to rally. Claunch connected with Gunner Bagos on a slant pass that went 69 yards for a touchdown to close the gap to 33-13 after the two-point conversion failed.

But Del Oro put the game away with 21 unanswered points. Gee scored his second touchdown of the game on a 4 yard run late in the third quarter. Smartt scrambled out of the pocket and found Hurst in the end zone again for a 30 yard touchdown pass to make it 47-13 in midway through the fourth quarter. Finally, Bryce Edwards made it 54-13 late in the fourth with a 5 yard scoring run.

Perhaps as a tip of the cap to the senior class, the Bulldogs dialed up four plays designed for a few of their best seniors on the final possession of the season. Senior linebacker and fullback Jacob Abramowicz took two carries --one of which went 20 yards--, senior running back Bagos took a handoff for eight yards and seniors Claunch and Donaldson connected for the final time on a 15 yard strike as time expired.

The fall football season is just a small segment of a larger year-round commitment put forth by the players and coaches. Although the game didn't go according to plan, Papadopoulos was proud of his players and their evolution this year.

"It's always emotional when you get into a playoff situation and the journey comes to an end," he said. "This is a long, long year commitment these guys make. Every one of these kids grew up

this year and it's been a pleasure to work with all of them. From the first scrimmage to now, there has been great growth. I'm very proud of everyone on this team."